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FM AMEMBASSY RIGA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4521  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIGA 000850

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CVIS](#) [MARR](#) [LG](#)  
SUBJECT: LATVIA: DAS GARBER DISCUSSES VISA WAIVER, CFE, AND  
MISSILE DEFENSE

REF: A. RIGA 744  
[1](#)B. RIGA 629

Classified By: Ambassador Catherine Todd Bailey for Reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: EUR DAS Judith Garber visited Riga on November 7 and 8 for meetings with GOL officials at the MFA and DOD. All MFA officials stressed the Visa Waiver program as priority number one in the bilateral relationship. The Latvian MOD expressed strong support for U.S. efforts to negotiate a Missile Defense (MD) agreement with the Czech's and Poles, and reiterated GOL concerns on A/CFE. DAS Garber concluded the visit with an interview with a Russian language daily, touching upon transparency issues and the Visa Waiver program. End Summary.

Visa Waiver Drumbeat  
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[1](#)2. (C) At a dinner with MFA U/S Edgars Skuja and Latvian Ambassador to the U.S. Andrejs Pildegovics, the Latvians repeatedly asked for more details and timing on Visa Waiver. DAS Garber sketched out the next steps on the U.S. side and emphasized that the U.S. approach will treat program participants on an equal footing and that any security aspects of the program will operate on the principal of reciprocity.

[1](#)3. (C) In a separate meeting, MFA Undersecretary of for Consular Issues, Alda Vanaga, noted that the GOL is keen to move forward with practical next steps on Visa Waiver, including negotiating an MOU on security details and requirements. DAS Garber noted that the Latvians eagerness to move forward with visa waiver highlights the strong and friendly relationship our countries share. However, she urged patience, stressing that DHS, State and other U.S. departments are still hammering out the legal details necessary for any MOUs. MFA State Secretary Normans Penke also stressed that the GOL's number one foreign policy priority with respect to the United States is Visa Waiver.

Latvian Concerns on CFE  
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[1](#)4. (C) In a meeting at the MOD, Latvian Deputy State Secretary for Defense Planning, Janis Sarts described the

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strong partnership between the U.S. and Latvia on defense and security issues. He then stressed the GOL's determined views regarding adapted CFE negotiations (reftels). Sarts pointed out that the GOL is "concerned by the way Russia develops now, politically and militarily." Russia's "change of rhetoric and behavior affects our security . . . . CFE is not a piece of paper; it is something that affects our security." Sarts sketched out the GOL's thinking on the matter. "We are not prepared to go into discussion with Russia until this matter has been discussed at NATO." The

GOL wants NATO planning to underpin any eventual ceilings. However, they are increasingly realizing that they may, in practical terms, only get such planning from the US bilaterally: "We are willing to look at this bilaterally; still we have to have a common NATO position and agreed upon numbers." Sarts also stated that, with both presidential and parliamentary elections looming in Russia, he personally does not believe Putin has much room to reverse course on CFE--and therefore the GOR will indeed withdraw from the treaty.

15. (C) In a separate meeting, MFA State Secretary Normans Penke also stressed Latvia's security concerns in light of CFE: "Regardless of the decisions made on CFE, our defense will be a main topic of discussion both bilaterally and in NATO. These issues won't go away." Penke also mentioned energy security (the need for a stable, diversified supply) as a core strategic issue.

16. (C) DAS Garber assured both Sarts and Penke that, regarding CFE, the USG will not negotiate with Russia on matters affecting the Baltic nations without consulting the Baltic states in the process. She also added that the U.S. will not negotiate away basic principles.

#### Support for Missile Defense

17. (C) DAS Garber briefly summarized progress on missile defense negotiations with the Czech Republic and Poland. According to Sarts, though Latvia is not active in the debate on missile defense, the GOL supports U.S. plans to negotiate agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic. According to Sarts, "this support is pragmatic; this is the cheapest way for us to get protection from that threat as well." DAS Garber thanked Sarts for GOL support on the issue and urged Latvia's vocal support at NATO. She reiterated that the U.S.

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will not give Russia a veto over missile defense.

#### Comment

18. (C) With less than 24 hours on the ground in Riga, DAS Garber was able to meet several of the key decision makers in Latvia and receive substantial briefings from Embassy Riga's country team. Though interest in the Visa Waiver program at times crowded out discussion on many other potential topics with GOL officials, all those who met with DAS Garber stressed the lasting and deep relationship between the U.S. and Latvia. These officials were of course delighted that DAS Garber choose Latvia as the first Baltic state to visit.

19. (U) This cable was cleared by DAS Garber.  
BAILEY